Milestone

2004

MILESTONE

SOUTHWESTERN COMMUNITY COLLEGE

VOLUME 5 2004

ART & LITERATURE REVIEW

CREATIVE EXPRESSIONS OF WESTERN NORTH CAROLINA ARTISTS & WRITERS

Copyright 2004 Southwestern Community College
All Rights Reserved

Cover Design ~ Shay Shular

Faculty Advisors
Owen Gibby, Allan Grant ~ Literature
Roger Stephens ~ Art Direction

Layout & Design ~ Lisa Fisher
Editor ~ Toni Knott

Mission Statement
Milestone is the annual art and literature review published by Southwestern Community College. The purpose of this publication is to showcase the creative expressions of Western North Carolina artists and writers.

We would like to thank the following individuals for their contribution to this publication.

Editorial Committee
Owen Gibby
Allan Grant
Toni Knott
Margie Askins
Gene Norton
Roger Stephens

Thanks to:
Gene Couch
Chris Cox
Melissa Pendergast
Michael Revere
Bob Satterwhite
Terry Tolle

We would like to thank the Student Leadership Association and the Arts and Sciences Division of the College for funding this issue of *Milestone.*

This issue of *Milestone* is dedicated in memory of Gene Lominac....

Minnows in the stream
like tarnished silver shadows
of golden moments

from "Observations in the Manner of Haiku"
Gene Lominac

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2023 with funding from
North Carolina Digital Heritage Center

https://archive.org/details/milestone200405sout

MILESTONE

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1 Pen & Ink Illustration
Brenda Benik

2 Moonshine Trail
Wilford Corbin

4 Driving North on US #1
Joyce Foster

5 Photograph
June Winger

6 Wrestling Bends
Mark Prudowsky

8 The High Roller
David R. Lewis

12 Lunch for One
Joyce Foster

13 Computer Illustration
Jennifer Enloe

14 Pen & Ink Illustration
Christine Hubinger

15 Pushing Out
Betty Holt

16 Mourning Call
Joyce Foster

17 Painting
Erin Ryan

18 Painting
June Winger

19 Dancing in the Piazza San Marco
Thomas Rain Crowe

20 Lee's Decision
Doug Maynard

23 Photograph
Brenda Benik

24 We Burn Good Together
Michael Revere

25 Pen & Ink Illustration
Stephanie Fajardo

26 Bitter Morning
Mark Prudowsky

30 The Blue Rose of Venice
Thomas Rain Crowe

31 Cut Paper
Christine Hubinger

32 Last Call
Eric S. Brown

36 Painting
John Van Bumble

37 Typography
Graphic Design Students

38 Print
Hether Pierce

39 Paper Listens
Beau Carrroll

40 Photograph
Clifford Lail

41 Photograph
Jacqueline Romanski

MILESTONE

TABLE OF CONTENTS

42 Boyhood Memories—Ice Is Nice on Cedar Lake
Robert Blaske

44 Photograph
David L. Cybul

45 On Parades and Rain
Gene Lominac

46 Computer Typesetting
Randy Barress

47 Crooked Fingernails
George Frizzell

48 "I Forgive You Mom"
James Arthus

50 Computer Illustration
Randy Barress

51 Smoke, Doors and Flesh
Eric Hendrix

52 Cut Paper
Sonnia Seay

53 Haiku
Eileen Wheeldon

54 Emotions
Donna Sanders

57 Painting
June Winger

58 Photograph
Lindsay Baldwin

59 Autumn's Place
Jacqueline Romanski

Painting 60
John Van Bumble

Remembering the Future 61
Jacqueline Romanski

Haiku 62
Seth Crockett

Painting & Cut Paper 63
Christine Hubinger

Sunset Wednesday 64
George Frizzell

Pen & Ink Illustration 66
Brenda Benik

Room #23 67
Karen Gilfillan

Computer Illustration 72
Tom Hurst

Where Have You All Gone 73
Joyce Foster

Poem: White Paper Heart Queen 74
Misty Lackey

Pen & Ink Illustration 75
Gideon Deschain

Sunday Afternoon 76
Eric Hendrix

Collage 78
April Rich

Pen & Ink Illustration 79
Daniel Brooks

MILESTONE

TABLE OF CONTENTS

80 am i
Dave Waldrop

82 Pen & Ink Illustration
Jennifer Enloe

83 Sculpture
Hether Pierce

84 Dancing on the Road
Regina Swimmer

88 Pen & Ink Illustration
Tom Hurst

89 Pen & Ink Illustration
Clifford Lail

90 Dawn
Michael Revere

91 Painting
Christine Hubinger

92 The Battle of the Birdfeeder
Edwina Hauversburk

97 Computer Illustration
June Winger

98 Lonesome Soul
Michael Revere

99 Photograph
Jacqueline Romanski

100 Time
Michael E. Bingham

101 Computer Illustration
Clifford Lail

102 Call for Submissions

BRENDA BENIK
FIRST PLACE - ART

Moonshine Trail

WILFORD CORBIN
FIRST PLACE - SHORT STORY

"No," said the old moonshiner standing outside his mountain cabin on the head of the creek. His wrinkled jaw muscles quivered. My uncle had just asked him for some "good" corn liquor. My uncle was home from the war, and I was home on leave from Navy boot camp in San Diego. That was eight weeks after the end of WWII.

"I don't know where you can get any liquor," the old man added as he studied us with eyes in thin slits under bushy, gray lashes. "Who are you fellers? And how'd you get here?"

"We walked across the mountain through the Burgin Gap," my uncle responded. "We couldn't get a taxi because of the ice and snow. Don't you remember me? I was here the day before I left for the war."

The old man looked my uncle in the eye then down at our feet, but said nothing. He turned his back and paused, then walked slowly toward a grove of tall hemlocks where the snow had either melted or the trees had prevented snow from reaching the ground.

"Where's he going?" I asked, thinking our long walk was a wild goose chase. Before the war I respected my uncle, who was eight years my senior. I had looked up to him, but was now having doubts about his judgment. Perhaps the long years of fighting with the Marines on islands in the Pacific had taken a toll. I had preferred we wait till the snow melted and the roads cleared. Then we could hire a taxi and I'd go with him anywhere he wanted to go. But he insisted we walk today the four miles through the high mountain pass. I didn't know the trail was so steep and the snow so deep.

"Wait!" said my uncle, grinning. "Maybe he's going to get some."

The old man kicked some dead sticks and leaves. He stooped and picked up a small rotten limb. He threw it aside and stood up straight. He

looked up the hill. He took a few steps then rolled a large decaying log. He reached down and retrieved a gallon jug. He held it up then looked at it. He wiped dirt and trash off the sides and around a rusty cap then returned with the jug to us. He smiled as he handed the jug to my uncle. He said, "Here."

My uncle smiled as he took the jug with both hands. He shook it and said, "Look at those beads."

"That's good liquor," said the old man proudly. "The best I ever made."

"Look at those beads!" my uncle repeated as he seemed in no hurry to offer to pay, or ask the price.

And the old man told a story about an incident that occurred when he made the run.

But I wasn't listening. I suggested, "Maybe we should pay the man. And get started back across the mountain." I wondered why my uncle hadn't already offered to pay. Before the war he was always first to reach for his wallet and was never late to pay any debt he owed. But here he was now, just smiling.

And the old man was also smiling as he said, "I don't want any money. You boys did a good job for the country. I couldn't take anything more."

After we left and were walking up the trail, I said, "That was really nice of the old man to give us a whole gallon of liquor."

"But I paid him."

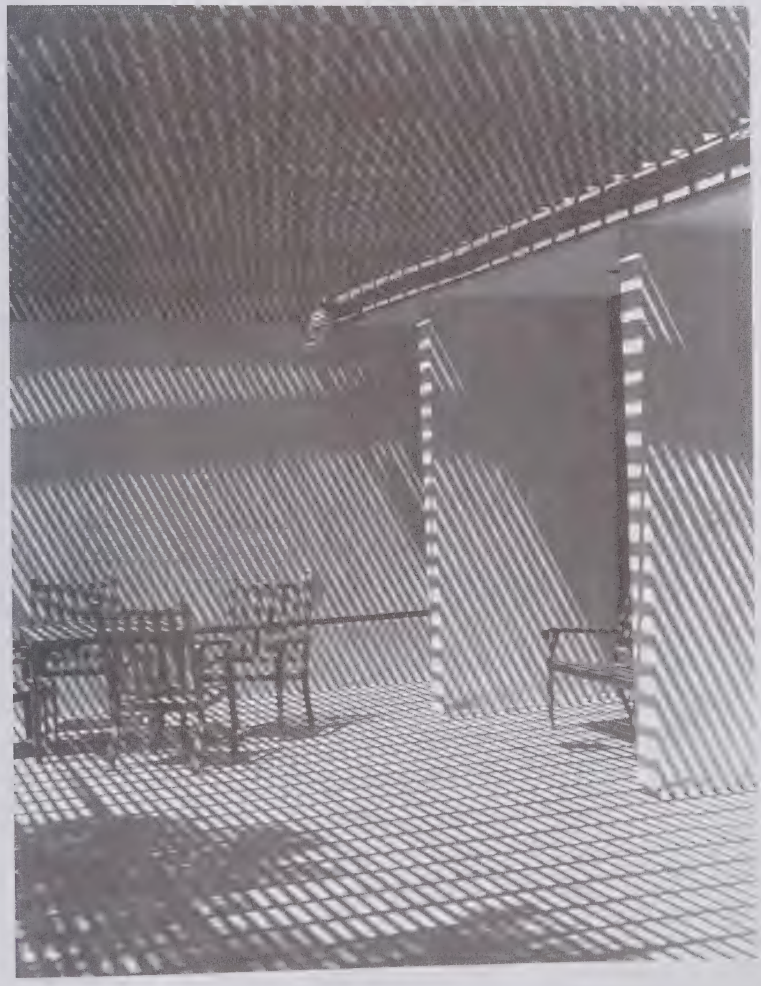
"You paid him! You say you *paid* him?" I was flabbergasted.

"I paid him the day before I left to go to the war. I gave him two dollars to save me a gallon. I told him, 'I'll come get it if I come back. But if I don't come back, don't worry about it.' He remembered."

Driving North on US #1

JOYCE FOSTER
FIRST PLACE - POETRY

I felt more than saw
the weariness of the scene
as it sank upon its bones
like a withered old face
pockmarked by billboards,
fences torn and worn out
shacks down on their knees
in a strangle of vines.
    Wrapped in tinted glass
    and sleek steel, I winced
    at the intrusion.
A windowless structure of cinder block
squatted low to the ground.
THE TABERNACLE
OF ETERNAL LIGHT
guarded with vacant eyes
a tree shrouded graveyard,
a straggle of stones broken
and stained like rotted teeth.
    The bones signaled me
    but I remained belted
    in quiet leather.
Then I saw a figure, black and straight,
standing over a grave
so freshly mounded
I could smell the loam.
She turned and walked away
stopped and returned to stand again
over the corpse in the ground
in that copse of pines.
    I tried to let her go,
    as I sped down the road,
    but skeletons pursued me.



JUNE WINGER
SECOND PLACE - ART

Wrestling Bends

MARK PRUDOWSKY
SECOND PLACE - POETRY

i
I kiss my son, drive away
not saying, "I love you,"
aware of this
as his image fades
waiting, assuming nothing.

ii
These warehouse trusses
once spanned commerce
conducted along a river
choked with barges. Now
coho run the river.
The large shed roof
shelters transformations.

We throw up ladders,
punch holes in firebrick,
route pipes to junction
boxes,
splice old cables
to newer twists of copper—
wrestle old bends to
learn new ways of being in
the world.

I leave for the supply house,
assume an understanding,
only to return
to my son fussing

atop the ladder
covered in red dust,
a young man
hard at work among other men
hard at work.
That's not where I told you
to drill the holes.
Those are the wrong conduits.
They're live! Are you stupid?
Did you listen to a word I
said?

He waits time's
slow-crawl under
trusses where other workmen
witness his humiliation.
One of them, Alex,
places a hand on my shoulder
Mark you need to hear
yourself.
That's your son.

Echoes words spoken
by his father's friend
on a remote Arizona homestead
as his father raged
against Alex,
before the old man started to
heal in his surrender to
cancer.

The High Roller

DAVID R. LEWIS

SECOND PLACE - SHORT STORY

"Bernie called," my wife told me as we sat down to enjoy our before-dinner, thank-God-this-week-is-over drink. This was not good news. Bernie was an old college friend who lived in D.C. and during the winter would use our house as his own little place in sunny Miami.

"When?" I responded. "And for how long?"

"He's not coming here. He's in Nassau with Bette."

Bette, Bernie's cute, little, blond wife, and I got along fine. She was a chorus teacher, and whenever I was near her, my body would hum. I liked her.

"Bernie wanted to know if we would like to join them tomorrow night for dinner, a show, and a little gambling."

"Sounds like a great time," I said. "Where do we get the money?"

My wife, at the time a woman who was destined to become president of the First Wives Club, told me that Bernie's friend Tom had two tickets on a high-roller junket to Nassau—fully paid airfare, limo service, dinner, booze, show…the whole enchilada. The tickets were ours if we wanted them.

I looked at her. "Where do I pick them up?"

"I already have them. Tom came to the store this afternoon. By the way," continued my darling, "he said to dress up and try to behave." Her eyes started to narrow and she gave me her warning stare.

Our son drove us to the airport. His parting words, "Mom, keep him out of trouble," got me thinking that I needed to have a heart-to-heart with that boy one of these days. They both laughed and hugged. I received the same narrow-eyed stare from the two of them.

As we walked to Concourse 11, Gate 78, I received my final instructions from Suzanne. "Don't drink too much; keep your hands off Bette; and can't you walk without clumping?" I was wearing brand-new, hand-tooled boots, and clumping was the nicest thing she had said about them so far.

It was a quick, thirty-minute flight to the island. There were two very nice ladies serving fruit drinks. I believe they called them Margaritas. I was savoring my third "fruit" drink when Max, our tour leader, a Runyonesque character—pork pie hat, thick cigar, short, with shoulders wide enough to brush heads on both sides of the aisle—told us the plane would return to Miami at 2 a.m. He then handed out boarding passes with the warning that no one could return without a pass.

A lady asked what happened if you lost the pass. Max thought for a minute and then vaguely said, "I donno."

I slipped my pass into one of my boots, the safest place I could think of, and asked my sweetheart if she wanted me to keep her pass. "No," she said, "I need to be home tomorrow."

We landed and were escorted through a barrier of tall, white-uniformed guards to our limo. Bernie and Bette met us at the hotel entrance. Ignoring Bernie, I turned to Bette and said, "It's been a long time. Give us a little hug."

We strolled through the casino on the way to the dining room. Some of our tour members were already at the gaming tables. When I mentioned this to Bernie, he told me that most of the tour people don't eat or see the shows. They were high rollers and were here to gamble. I was anxious to join them.

The dining room was beautiful, like a 1940s Hollywood musical—red-covered tables on different levels, tuxedoed waiters, wine stewards. I loved it. This is where I should be. I was home at last!

Bernie and my sweetie pie ordered beef and red wine. Bette and I selected two wonderful lobsters. Bernie ordered us a great wine, "Cruse, something or other." I remember the wine was delicious. It never reached your throat. Your mouth and tongue would greedily absorb it all. Bette and I "cruised" through three bottles.

I heard Bernie say to my favorite wife, "He's too plotzed to gamble. How much money does he have?"

"Only a hundred dollars," Suzanne said," but you're right. I'll get his credit cards."

I put up a fight but gave up easily because I knew I had more than a hundred. I had hit the credit union for two hundred more. I was loaded in more than one way!

After dinner we went over the game plan. Bette voted to pass on the show to do some shopping. Bernie and my sweet wife decided to pool fifty dollars apiece and see how they did as partners.

I was going to conquer the world. I was going into the lion's den to get his bone. I was ready to gamble!

I believe it took me forty-seven minutes to lose my three hundred dollars.

So I found myself broke—not even a farthing—wandering about the casino

looking for my most understanding wife and trying to look sophisticated at the same time. There! I spotted her and Bernie at the blackjack table and *they had chips*!—about a foot high—piled between them.

"Well, aren't you two having good luck!" I said, as I approached, in my most friendly, warm manner.

"Get away," they snapped in unison.

"Look, I just want to borrow a hundred bucks—one, little black chip. You got a bunch of them."

Bernie turned his back, and Sweetness gave me the same look she'd given me the night she caught me cheating at Monopoly.

"How about fifty bucks?" I asked. "Look, let me have twenty and I'll leave you alone."

The dealer looked at Bernie, received a nod, and the next thing I saw was this tuxedo. I mean this guy was BIG! His partner, another one like the first one, asked Bernie, "Is there a problem?"

"Bernie," I cried, "they'll throw me to the sharks."

While my two new friends walked me to the casino exit, they revealed some true facts of life. It was like being with the Dalai Lama. One of the facts revealed to me was, "Don't return without money." My teachers left me a wiser man.

Now, how to get some money! It was only 11 p.m.—three hours before the limo. What was I going to do?

You know, sometimes when you're having a really bad day, how a person will touch you and everything seems better? Well, there she was. My little chorus teacher. She never looked better, and I started to hum, "Brother, can you spare a dime?"

Using a type of "gansta" rap, I said, "Bette, I need to put a touch on you."

"You do, and I'll tell Suzanne."

"Who's Suzanne?" I asked.

"I'm going to tell her you said that, too."

"Bette, you don't understand. I need some money," I pleaded.

She clutched her handbag to her ample chest. "They told me not to give you anything," she said, "not even a quarter for a phone call."

"Bette, we're friends. We drink together. Loan me a lousy twenty bucks."

She gave me a familiar stare. "Here—take it," she whispered, "but if you ever tell Suzanne, I'll kill you!"

I looked in my hand—two $10 bills. It took two plays at the ten-dollar table. The dealer hit consecutive twenty-ones—about fifty-two seconds. I reflected,

sitting in the hotel lobby and watching the clock, "only 11:30 and still an hour and a half to kill."

An elderly man sitting across from me asked, "Having a bad night?"

"You might say that," I murmured.

"Say," he said, "those are beautiful boots you're wearing."

"Cost me 250 bucks, and they're brand new—size 11's," I said, for I smelled a deal.

"I'll give you fifty bucks for them right now," he said.

"Sold," I responded.

He peeled fifty bucks from a fat roll of bills.

They really had plush carpets in that casino. You could hardly tell I was in my stocking feet, or, at least, that's what I told myself as I glided to a convenient blackjack table. Feeling lucky, I put the whole fifty dollars down. "Blackjack! I won!" The spirit was with me. "Let it ride," I coolly said to the dealer. Twenty-eight seconds later, I was done in again.

The limo ride was quiet. You could not tell if the three stone-faced men with us had won or lost. I tried to hide my feet.

At the airport gate I watched as Suzanne handed her yellow boarding pass to the guard. My heart sank. I whispered, "I lost my pass," to the guard.

"What did you say?" he asked loudly.

"I lost my pass," I said.

The guard and Suzanne said in unison, "You lost your pass?"

"Where are your boots?" Suzanne asked with surprise. Then she turned, and I could hear her laughing.

"They're going to keep me here!" I shouted.

She was laughing so hard that tears were rolling down her cheeks.

"Don't leave me without money!" I cried.

She walked off, her body still shaking with laughter.

I waited with the guard. It started to rain. The plane engines turned over. Max showed up and talked to the guard. They shook hands. I figured twenty bucks had been exchanged.

Max muttered, "You know, guys like you make this a tough business."

I was wondering what that meant as I boarded the plane and walked to my seat. People were snickering and looking at my feet.

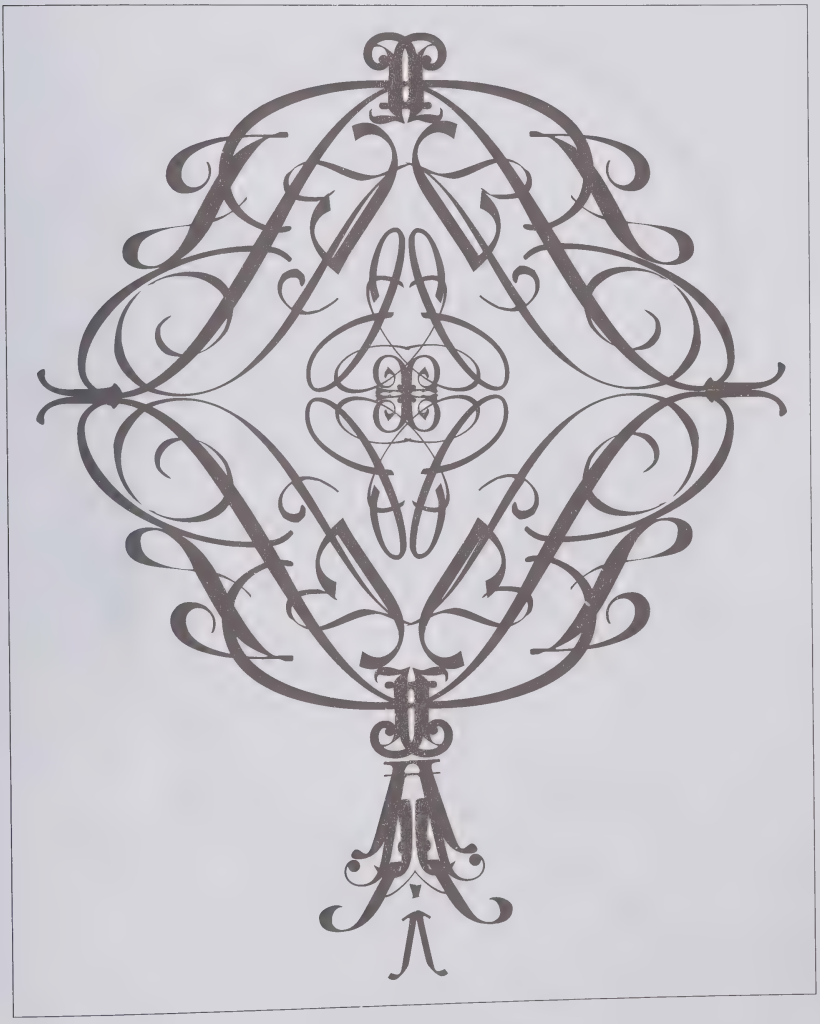
The next morning I heard Suzanne and the boys laughing hysterically.

"Well," I thought, "a lot of people just don't know how to have a real good time."

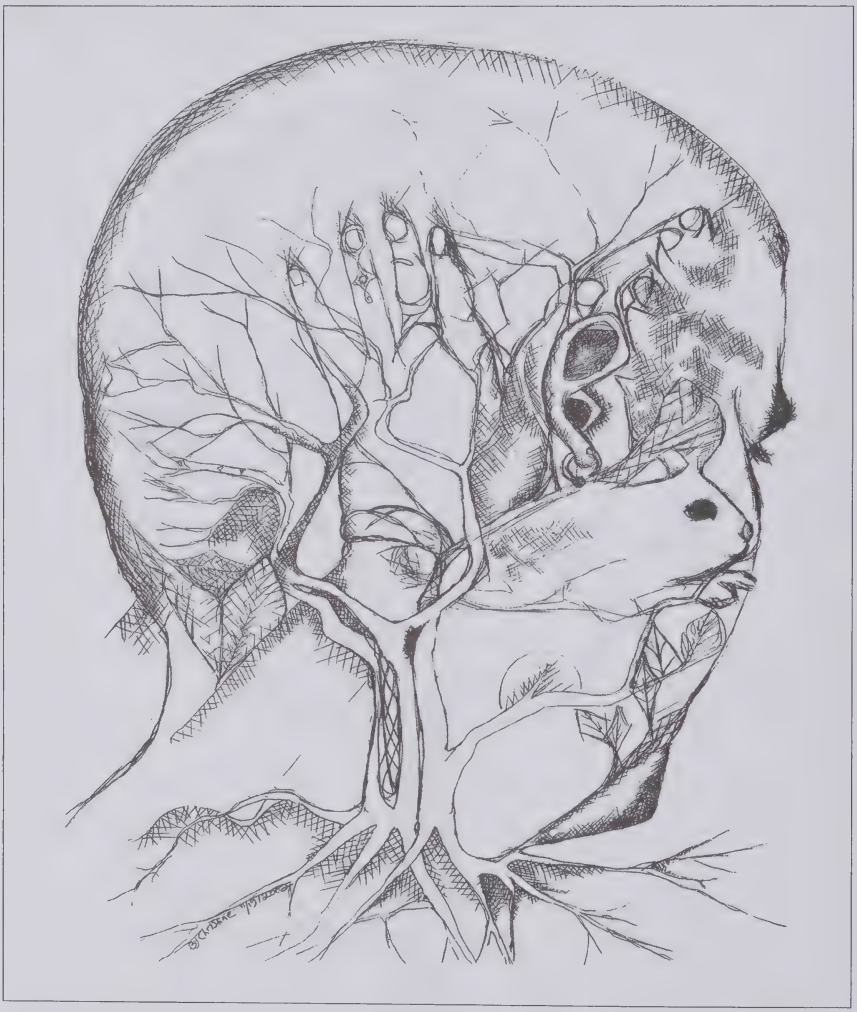
LUNCH for ONE

JOYCE FOSTER

I will wash these pearl
white mushrooms
their caps as little ships
the stems their masts.
I will sauté them brown
in yellow butter
and place them on a
blue Spode plate
with triangles of toast
for mains and jibs
that you may sail across
your pink tongue.



JENNIFER ENLOE



CHRISTINE HUBINGER

Pushing Out

BETTY HOLT

They push their way out
Like baby calves trying to be born
These snatches of rhythm and rhyme
Looking for a song to be in.

They come tumbling forth
Like someone opened the gate
And they had been standing
On the other side for a long, long time.

They won't hush—they won't!
They're determined to have their way,
Their day.

And the gate is open
And they jump through,
Laughing and shouting,
Abandoning all etiquette,
Giddy with excitement,
Just wanting to be on
The outside of my head.

Mourning Call

JOYCE FOSTER

Morning stretches and yawns
across the flatness of Florida's belly
on its way to the gulf
devouring the night like large gulps
of black coffee.

She wakes early as the day
struggles to its tasks
the shift of gears and the clang of the hopper
as it swallows the trash,
the insistent call of a mourning dove.

The smell of the neighbor's breakfast
mingles with stale breath
and the sweet stench of body sweat.
The covers stir as he reaches for her
and light falls on aged skin.

Morning stretches and yawns
across the bellies of the lovers
as they listen.

ERIN RYAN

JUNE WINGER

Dancing in the Piazza San Marco

THOMAS RAIN CROWE

First night in Venice.
We sit with pigeons
and crescent moon
drinking wine
in the Piazza San Marco.

At midnight
the B-flat bells of the campanile
fill our ears
and the big plaza.
Nearby,
a small symphonic band
plays "Moon River" then
"Al Di La."
Rising from my seat,
I reach for her hand.
We walk to the center
of this huge open space
lit by large electric candles and the moon.
Embracing,
we dance
to a Venecian waltz,
in slow circles,
round and round the square.

Lee's Decision

DOUG MAYNARD

Early in 1861, Colonel Robert Edward Lee, in command of the United States Second Cavalry, had been ordered to return to Washington, D.C., from fighting apache and Comanche Indians near the Rio Grande border of Old Mexico.

Lee, now fifty-four years old, was exhausted from his long trip and the danger and humiliation of being kicked out of San Antonio by Texas confederates. Texas rebels had just taken over all that state's federal forts, and since Lee had been wearing the beautiful blue "Yankee" uniform that he had worn proudly for thirty-five years, his life had been threatened, his possessions had been taken, and he had been forced to finish his long trip in civilian attire.

As he entered General Winfield Scott's office in new President Lincoln's Washington, D.C., Lee considered the imponderable decision he knew he now would have to make. "Old Fuss and Feathers" Scott was now over three hundred pounds and considered "ancient," but he was the most experienced military man alive and had been Lee's mentor in the army since the war with Mexico almost fifteen years ago. Lee knew that Scott was about to offer him the very thing he had hardly dared hope for in his long distinguished career—total command of all U.S. Army forces, just like his all-time hero and father figure, George Washington!

Washington was, of course, THE great hero of all America. Honoring his memory was the only thing remaining that southern "Fire Eaters" and the Yankee "Abolitionists" could still agree on since South Carolina and the others had moved on federal installations. Washington was the nation's hero, but to Robert E. Lee, he was more than that.

Washington was almost a living presence in the house and area of Virginia where Lee was born. His very home had come from Washington's family, and personal effects of the greatest American hero throughout the

residence reminded Lee of stories of the American Revolution and his father's relationship with Washington.

Lee's father was the Revolutionary War hero "Lighthorse Harry" Lee, friend of the great Washington himself, signer of the Declaration of Independence, and the man who originated the funeral quote about Washington being FIRST IN WAR, FIRST IN PEACE AND FIRST IN THE HEARTS OF HIS COUNTRY MEN.

Lee's poor father, who had suffered much worse defeats after the revolution than he ever had during it, had been forced to abandon his family and his country in debt and disgrace, and Lighthorse Harry had died far away when Lee had been only eleven years old.

At that young age, Robert had immediately assumed the role of "the man of the family" and had tended to his invalid mother until he left for the U.S. Military Academy in 1825 when he was eighteen. Of course, now we all know that he also spent the rest of his life tending to his invalid wife. Honor and Duty came first! Lee used the magnificent example of Washington as his role model as he determined to reclaim his family name and honor through a life dedicated to "duty, honor, and country," just as they said at West Point.

As a cadet at the U.S. Military Academy, Lee had been so perfect that even the other cadets called him "The Marble Model" in honor of his devotion to professionalism and his obvious qualities as a leader and a gentleman.

Lee had survived the insurrection against Federal installations in Texas, and as he walked into the office of his greatest friend in the army, he knew his job would be to put down any further loss of property and face by leading his mighty force against the rebels who had just started to build their army near Montgomery, Alabama, the capitol of the new confederacy.

Lee had stated often and plainly his opposition to both slavery and succession, and he knew Scott would expect him to follow his lead, himself a Virginian, and that of the other Virginians, such as Lee's friend George Thomas, who stood like a "rock" for the union and the U.S. flag. Yet Lee had paced the floor all the previous night trying to weigh his options, and his heart throbbed in his forehead as he continued to wipe his worried brow.

Should he honor his oath to the United States Army, or, as a Virginian, should he join the rebels threatening the very flag he had spent his whole adult life protecting and that had almost cost him his life in Texas? What did DUTY, HONOR, and COUNTRY require?

Of course, looking back now, we all know that Lee decided to accept the command of the mighty Union army, and, along with Scott, Thomas, and the many other loyal Virginians, he went on to crush the rebellion in just three months—just as everyone said they would. Although it was a minor thing, now hardly even mentioned in the history books, the short civil unrest and rebellion thrust Lee into the presidency over Lincoln in the election of 1864, and today you can visit the Lee Memorial in Washington, D.C. It's right beside the memorial to his hero, George Washington.

Ex-President Lee made the correct decision.

BRENDA BENIK

We Burn Good Together

MICHAEL REVERE

Starting fire in a downpour
is no problem for you and me.
We burn good together.

As we tend the late fall slash fire
I say sweaty feels good.
You say I'm nasty and smile.
I see beautiful curves
outlined under your t-shirt.
A small, dried out spruce tree
burst into flame.

Starting fire in a gully washer
is a cakewalk for you and me.
We've been burning great together
for decades
and I do believe flames are flaring up
over the future's horizon.

STEPHANIE FAJARDO

Bitter Morning

MARK PRUDOWSKY

i

The wife clutches a damp
dishrag in her hand, smiles
beside her husband's clouded resentment—
beside his squints into morning light.
He spits a stream of brown juice
at my feet.
"How much we owe you?"
"No charge ma'am."

ii

Pliers on a gritty cellar sill,
washed in the suffusion of light
off the east pasture's oats—
honed to a fine edge this morning—
like the old-man's acrimony.

His wife tells me of
the buzzing in her arm
each time her wet dishrag
describes an arc atop the stove—
can I fix what her hobbled husband
can't or won't?

The stiff creak of stairs
the threshold stumble,
his cover-alls hang from a
shriveled mumbling bulk.
Silent, I trim my terminations,
seal the electric panel,
gather my tools and watch a
creased, liver-stained hand
wrap my pliers in a palsied resentment.

"Kleins," he mutters,
squinting through rheumy, hooded eyes
at a faded logo, etched twenty years ago
on pivots of the plier knives—
a linesman straddling a telegraph pole in 1856.
"Expensive pliers."

He sends a stream of brown
juice to the cracked dirt at my feet.
I glance up and watch spittle hang
from a chin receding into
wattles.
He turns and totters out

iii

Turns away from the quick-quiver
of synapses firing off memories of
an anxious rookie
running hands over his first Kleins pliers,
by the tool crib hemmed in by
steel tubs of drop-forged
halves—stacked, waiting
to become joined, polished, honed and new—
tubs reverberating from the horn blast
signaling a thousand workers
to their first-trick stations—

signaling the electricians
sipping paper poker-cups of coffee,
to gather round their foreman as he
hands-out green, maintenance-order-cards.

The rookie, sips from his
one-eyed jack while he reads his:
"Replace feed motor on second dipping line,"
Wonders *Can I shut down power when I*
do, knowing it'd shut down line one, too—
sent on his way
by a foreman's level stare—
and smirks of vets
Son—if you can't work on it live, perhaps
you don't belong here.

Four hundred eighty volts
suspended from a bussway's
crusted oxidation, inches
above a rookie atop

a ladder no one steadies.
Draws a breath—
torques the lug
of a silent copper bar and
wonders what four hundred and eighty feels like
crossing the heart, grabbing hold, shaking one
like a sheave of oats on a threshing floor.
He terminates cable one—

His new Kleins knife
through twisted copper strands
stripping plastic jackets
floating to the floor.
He terminates cable two—

He squints in a smoky haze
that drifts on the din of doors
clanking shut on ovens
annealing pliers,
next bay over.
He terminates cable three.

iv

"Done so soon?"—the foreman
seems surprised and hands out
task two,
withholds a caution,
as the rookie heads
to the annealing line—
"Replace counter—machine five."
The counter that clicks
each time the proximity switch
detects a passing pliers,
each time ten thousand volts
stirs the plier-head's slate-gray mass
to a rouged-glow, to
temper fine honed
edges of pliers like mine.

The department foreman
tells the rookie:
"I'll shut it down."

"Nah—don't bother—I'll work it live."
Foreman shrugs, shakes his head
this rookie's not wrapped too tight—

v

I want the old-man to totter down
the steps—fix his clouded gaze on the *me*
approaching the equipment
with my too-expensive pliers
clutched in my confidence—
want him to watch the foreman
who knows better,
the rookie who doesn't,
place *my* hand on the
door's chrome handle
enclosing the counter, and
ten thousand volt capacitors.

Watch the instant, old man—
the pivoting bars
slide free—
release the door,
release the blast.
Watch me fly back
against the concrete block
like the cat your foot sent flying against
the barn door when I arrived this morning.
Watch the shirtsleeve smolder.
Smell the charred flesh—
listen to the owner
tell the rookie
when he wakens to
the sting of ammonia
"I'm gonna fire your ass."

Damn right they're *expensive,*
old man. Sill making payments on 'em—
each time a shudder passes before cutting
into the utility's un-fused line—
each time the angry lash flashes
when I place my hands in panels like yours.

"No charge ma'am, no charge."

The Blue Rose of Venice

for Nan

THOMAS RAIN CROWE

Too much time has gone by
since I have put my love for her
into actions or in words.
To make up for
my manly lack of romance,
I buy tickets to Venice
with money I don't have.
In a city where voices
sound more like music than human talk,
we wander the streets and canals
on our first night.
Someone is selling roses for a Euro
near the Bridge of Sighs.
With the strange silver coin in my pocket,
I choose the only one in the bunch
that is blue
(to match her linen dress
and her hair in the light of the moon)
which I place in a wine bottle
in the window
of our convent room.
In the morning,
the sound of skylarks
is what we hear.
In Titian's light,
a poem of indigo
against red rooftops
is what we see.

Venice
June, 2003

CHRISTINE HUBINGER

Last Call

Eric S. Brown

Owen donned his Kevlar vest and wondered why he bothered. It wasn't as if the enemy shot back these days. Usually if his unit made it to the scene of the disturbance at all, all that was left were the dead lumbering around with drooling mouths and eying the SWAT van like a meat wagon as it pulled up.

During the first few days, before the dead were everywhere and martial law had been declared, Owen had kept track of the number of "dead-heads" he'd put back in their graves. It'd made him feel like he was making a difference, however small, but after his fifty-second kill, he had given up counting. The world was going to shit anyway.

Two days ago, Owen had finally been forced to move into the station. The subways were closed down and the streets were like a war zone. It was difficult to get anywhere in the city. Abandoned and wrecked cars cluttered the roads. Packs of looters and vigilantes prowled the alleyways and dark corners as eager to "pop" any other "breather" they came across for a profit, just as they killed the dead-heads for sport.

Owen opened his locker and strapped on his holsters. He'd long since stopped using standard issue gear, even that of a SWAT unit like his own, and slid two, twin Mark XIX Desert Eagles into their homes. As he readied his new Mini-Beryl assault rifle, Sergeant Rigby walked into the locked room. The Sarge was already suited up and carried a sawed-off twelve gauge in his hand.

"Walter bother to show up today?" he grunted, leaning on a locker next to Owen's. It was a tired joke that had lost its zeal days ago, but the Sarge still seemed to find it amusing. Walter had been a member of the unit that had been shot by some looters, and his body had never been found. It was assumed he had reanimated and made off before the firefight was over with and that one day his corpse would come walking into the station, just like he did when he was alive, to head out on the day's run with them.

Owen shook his head in the negative.

"Hell, looks like it's just us and Josh then," the Sarge laughed. "Best get to it."

Owen nodded, snapping a magazine into his rifle, and followed the Sarge out to the parking area.

Their first call was the normal kind of "BS"—two idiots holed inside a bank they managed to screw up robbing. Three "Blue Boys," as Owen called the beat cops, had the place surrounded as best they could. The whole department was hurting for manpower and everyone was stretched thin, not

just Owen's unit. From the layout of the bank, it looked as if it was going to be a bitch to get the pair of would-be robbers out of there.

The Sarge stood talking plans with the ranking Blue Boy as Owen headed off to find a good sniping position across the street. He never made it there, however. Josh solved the problem of the situation very easily by putting an anti-tank rocket straight through the bank's main window. The building erupted into a shower of shrapnel and flames, knocking Owen to the ground.

When the Sarge asked Josh what the hell he was thinking, in front of the bewildered Blue Boys, Josh's answer was simple: "Frag it, Sarge; there wasn't anything in there anyway but paper and scum bags."

Later as Owen's unit of three drove toward the warehouse district where a large mass of dead-heads had been reported on the move, Owen found himself still laughing at Josh's response. It he didn't laugh, then he would be forced to think about what actually had happened and the sick absurdity of it all. Money was a thing of the past, yet those two losers had died trying to make off with bags of it. Owen had no idea why. He guessed old habits died hard.

As they reached the corner of Eighth and Main, he noticed red lights flashing from a side street as the van drove nearer to it. "Josh, slow down, man," he ordered.

The SWAT van came to a crawl as Owen peered out its pus-stained window. The window was always a mess. The team couldn't keep it clean. Josh had a tendency to run down any dead-heads he could, if possible, and often he didn't have a choice. The things were either too slow or stupid to get out of the van's way when it came tearing down an avenue.

"Is that an ambulance?" Josh asked, his own gaze following Owen's.

"Think it is," Owen agreed. "Should we call it in, Sarge?"

The Sarge leaned up from the back to get a look as Josh brought the van to a complete stop. "What the hell is it doing just sitting there?"

"Jeez, Sarge, you don't have to be a smart ass about it," Josh snapped. It was clear the ambulance had been overrun by dead-heads.

The Sarge grinned, showing off yellow tobacco-stained teeth.

"I thought all emergency vehicles were supposed to have a Blue Boy escort now," Owen commented.

"Well, I guess this one didn't. Too bad for them," the Sarge laughed.

"So do we call it in or not?" Josh asked again, eager to be back on the move. If you were smart, you didn't stay in any one place too long, not even if you were as heavily armed as they were.

The Sarge seemed to think it over for a moment. "Belay that shit. We're here; we'll check it out."

Josh shot an angry glance at Owen, as if blaming him for noticing the thing to begin with.

Owen turned away, saying, "Sarge says check it out, we check it out." He kicked open his passenger seat door and stepped out onto the street with his Mini-Beryl held ready.

Josh followed reluctantly, clutching his Uzi in white-knuckled hands. The Sarge got out too, but stayed by the van with its engine still running.

Owen walked toward the ambulance as its light continued to spin, slicing the night with its red beam. "We've got an officer down," he called back at the Sarge.

He gently set down his Beryl on the street and drew one of his Desert Eagles. It would work much better at point blank if the officer turned out to be a dead-head. He squatted over the officer's body. She was young, probably in the twenties from the looks of her. It looked as if she had put up a good fight too, trying to protect the rescue workers to the end. Several dead-heads lay rotting around her. Owen rolled her over to look at her face and badge. Large chunks of flesh and uniform were missing from her shoulders, and her throat had been gnawed open. Her long blonde hair lay beside her face in a blood-matted ponytail. Even as he read the name on her badge, he heard the Sarge, who had moved up behind him, whisper, "Loretta."

The Sarge dropped to his knees beside Owen and the body. His eyes glistened in the pale glow of the streetlights.

"You knew her?" Owen asked.

"She's my granddaughter," the Sarge muttered weakly.

"God…I'm sorry."

"She's about to be a f----ing dead-head," Josh warned.

Owen knew from experience what was about to go down. He'd seen it too many times before.

"Josh, go and check the damn ambulance," the Sarge ordered. "Owen and I will handle this." The Sarge looked into Owen's eyes with a pleading stare.

"I'm sorry," Owen offered again, "but Josh is right." He pressed the barrel of his Desert Eagle to Loretta's forehead and pulled the trigger before the Sarge had time to move. The shot echoed in the empty streets.

"Owen!" the Sarge yelled. He swung his sawed-off shotgun up to be level with Owen's face as Josh opened up with his Uzi. Owen rolled to the side as the Sarge's shotgun thundered its burst, narrowly missing him. He watched the red blossoms sprouting across the Sarge's chest as he staggered and toppled over.

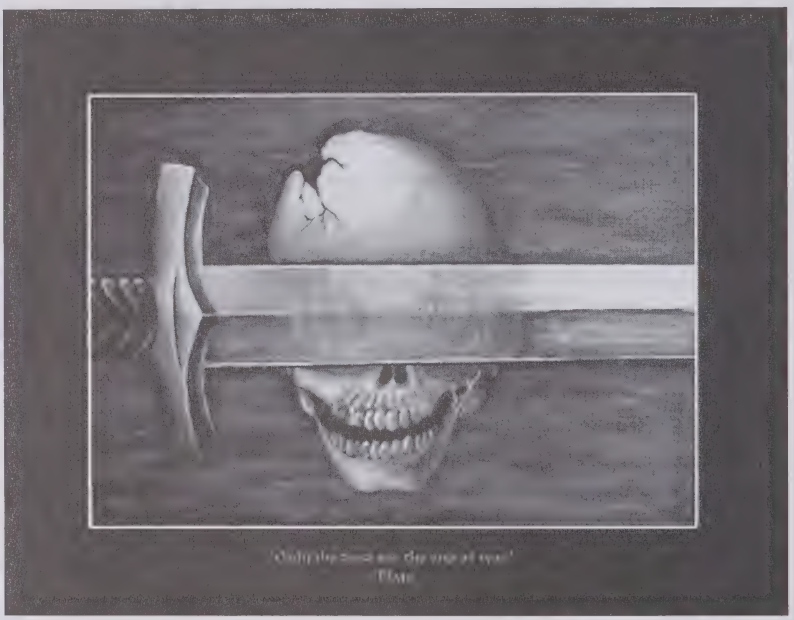
The ambulance door swung open behind Josh, and a woman in a hospital gown lunged out. An oxygen mask dangled about the wrinkled, gray skin of her neck. Her eyes were glazed but filled with hunger. She was covered with large open sores that leaked a type of infected, black ooze in place of blood. She grabbed Josh, and the pair went down, hitting the pavement hard. Josh struck out at her, punching her in the face. Her nose shattered and caved into her head, but she still managed to get her teeth onto Josh's cheek and when her head rose back up, Josh's blood dripped from her mouth. Josh howled at the pain from the hole in his face and threw her off him. He leapt over her and bashed his Uzi again and again into her head until her skull cracked and reddish pulp poured over and splashed onto his hands.

Owen stood watching it all in horror. He sighted his Eagle carefully and put a mercy round through Josh's temple.

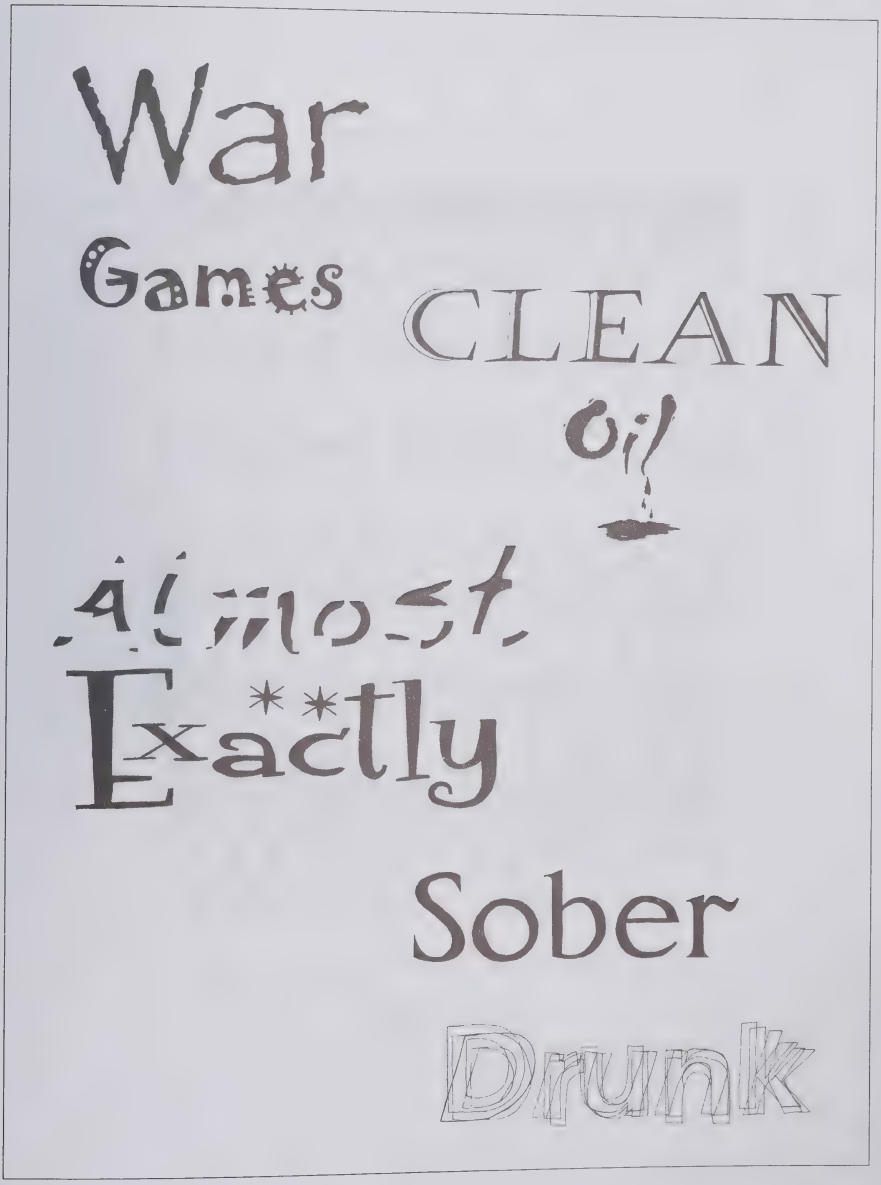
A soft moaning rose in the distance all around him, seeming to come from everywhere. Owen wished he could convince himself it was just the wind, but he knew better. The local dead-heads had heard the shots and were on their way for a late-night snack, if it could be found.

Owen made his way back to the van and climbed into the driver's seat. He heard the dispatcher yelling at him over the van's radio. They had failed to report to the station on time. He didn't reach for the radio, though. The first of the dead-heads were in sight now, spilling down the street in front of the van as they lumbered toward him. He put the van in gear and revved the engine.

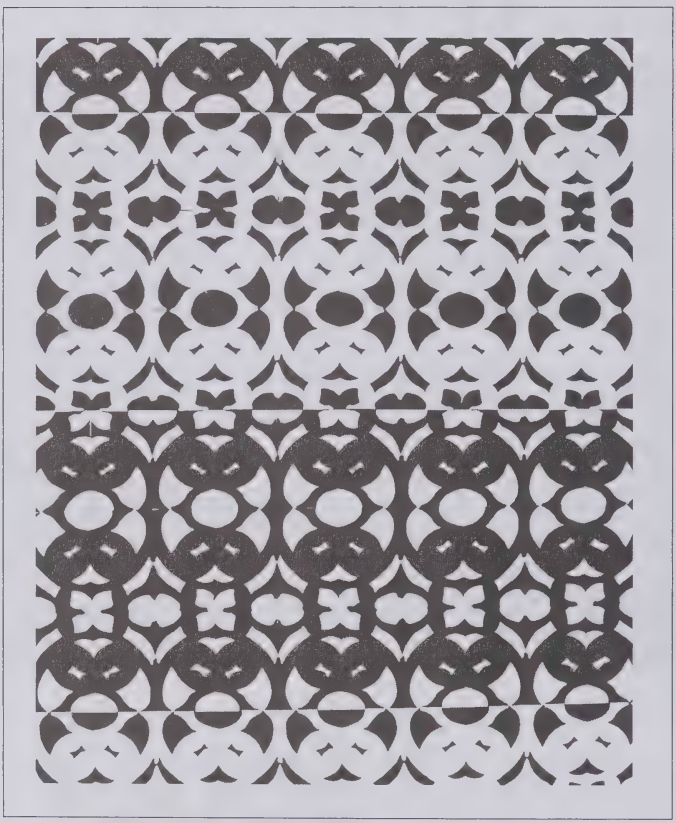
The city was dead, but he figured he'd head south. Perhaps down there, in the sticks, maybe humanity still stood a chance. He intended to find out. He floored the pedal, and the van roared to meet the mob.



JOHN VAN BUMBLE



SCC GRAPHIC DESIGN STUDENTS



HETHER PIERCE

Paper Listens

BEAU CARROLL

I can put my thoughts on paper for you to read
And I truly hope you get it

But if it wasn't for paper, I wouldn't have anything to say

My thoughts coming through a vast lake
Full of bad dreams and forgotten words

If not for paper would anyone understand or even listen?

If it doesn't have flashing lights or neon signs

It's overlooked like an old book with no cover

Nobody listens, nobody cares, if not, why should I?

I can make paper feel for me because it listens
To the words that come straight from my heart
At least someone or something's there for me

It's scary that five minutes before I wrote this
Nobody even cared

If not for this sheet of paper, nobody would even listen

CLIFFORD LAIL

JACQUELINE ROMANSKI

Boyhood Memories—Ice Is Nice on Cedar Lake

ROBERT BLASKE

Back in the real old days during the summer, the Monon Railroad came to Cedar Lake, Indiana, from Chicago. The train brought Chicago city people who wanted to get away to the farm country for a weekend. On the way back the train would take big blocks of ice cut out from the lake in the wintertime. They stored the rest of the ice in a wooden icehouse.

People didn't have refrigerators back in the old days; they had iceboxes, and the iceman would bring a block of ice to your house and put it in the icebox. The iceman was usually strong, and he'd carry maybe a twenty-five pound block on his shoulder pad. He wore gloves, but he wouldn't hold the ice block 'cause it would be melting and water would drip, and it was cold work. He used ice tongs to hold the ice on his shoulders. The tongs were made so if he grabbed one handle, the tongs would close up and dig into the ice and it wouldn't slip off his shoulder and fall on the ground. The iceman also carried a real sharp ice pick. It sort of looked like a pointed needle. He used the pick to chop the ice block up into smaller squares. Ice was always important around Cedar Lake.

Winter winds howled loudly from the north, and snow piled up high against the white picket fence bordering the road where the school bus couldn't make it. Ernie, our bus driver, would have tried to get us to school if he could, but they called him and even told it on the radio, "No school today…." The paperboy would make his delivery, though, 'cause he had a horse and sled. I admired the way he'd stand up on that big flat-bed sled with one hand holding the reins of his strong high-stepping work horse and throw papers with the other hand. With a wave hello, he and his horse just kept on moving through the hushed sounds of a horse breathing and the thud of hooves amid the silence of snowfall.

The best part was when Cedar Lake froze over with almost a foot-thick sheet of ice. Billy Johnson got out his sailing sled iceboat and would fly across the lake, from one end to the other. The lake, shaped like a peanut, was over five miles long and a half-mile wide at its narrow center. Billy would tighten up the sail and skim across the ice at speeds that neared fifty miles an hour before reaching the end where he'd have to turn around and tack back and forth to get home. I got to ride with Billy one time—and what a thrill! I never knew that sailboats could tip over on one side real far.

With an iceboat, one of the runners lifts high up in the air, and we had to lean far out on the other side to keep the boat from tipping over. The worse scare I got was when Billy headed for shore and didn't see the big metal pipe sticking up out of the ice. That pipe was where some rich guy anchored his big boat offshore. Lucky I yelled in time and Billy turned. We watched the top of that pipe pass right under the lifted sled runner of our iceboat. Good thing Ma didn't know about that one!

The lake could be very dangerous, even when you thought there was a foot-thick wall of ice under you. Sometimes foolish people would drive their cars out on the ice, laugh and slam on the brakes to spin around. One time the ice broke, and I guess the car is still down at the bottom of the lake. Us kids would get together and play hockey. We had pretend hockey sticks and used a tin can for a puck. Best when we could find an old snuff tin 'cause it looked like a hockey puck. There were some pretty fierce games batting that crumpled can around on the ice.

There were thousands of things to do on a winter day when there was no school. One particular day I got out on the ice early before the other kids and was skating backwards. All of a sudden it was like I disappeared off the face of the earth. Someone had cut a big hole in the ice to do some fishing, and I skated right into that hole. I had on some of those heavy hockey skates, a couple pairs of pants, a thick shirt and a jacket, and down I went under the water. I remember going down and my skates hitting the mud bottom. My parents had told me not to open my eyes under the water 'cause the lake was pretty polluted back in those days. It's a good thing I didn't obey them this time. When I opened my eyes, I could see the thick ice and silver pockets of air bubbles trapped under the hard shell surface. There was the dark square hole where I'd fallen through. It was up there above me, almost nine or ten feet to the surface. I shoved my feet with all my might and propelled myself upward toward that hole. Made it out of that watery grave with my elbows over the edge. No one was around to help, or even hear me if I did yell. Gradually, kicking and pulling against the slippery surface, I pulled myself out of the ice water. By the time I got back to our house, my clothes were a solid sheet of ice, but I sure was glad to be alive.

DAVID L. CYBUL

On Parades and Rain

GENE LOMINAC

Rain doesn't dampen
my adapting disposition.
One doesn't often
strut his stuff in a fancy uniform
having epaulets
brass buttons and braid
or ride a white horse
leading a parade
after sixty-five.

Satisfying frayed ambition
unpretentiously
sitting on an unclaimed park bench
dressed for the occasion
according to the forecast
feeding popcorn to proprietary pigeons
smiling at paraded babies
in gender-coded strollers
smiling at their mamas
driving them defensively
on everyday sidewalks.

One sits
absorbing sun warmth
storing it for cloudy days
under an always umbrella
impervious to sudden showers
and pedestrian attitudes.
One shrugs any-weather shoulders
not minding rain—
sometimes even liking it a little.

RANDY BARRESS

Crooked Fingernails

GEORGE FRIZZELL

never could trim my fingernails

to where they were straight

and grew smooth at the edges

the way you liked it;

never could keep them short enough

or not jagged

and never could get those white lies

off them;

but i always was fingertip polite,

and you never complained,

or, as i hoped,

it never mattered

"I Forgive You Mom"

JAMES ARTHUS

Mom I was never mad
Because I understand everything
Mom I forgive you for everything you have done to me
You gave birth to me
And left me since I was a little boy to survive
At age of twelve I got shot
While I was in hospital I called you up
Because I thought you were the only one I had, beside God
But you said to me
"Everybody got to die sometimes"
And you hung up on me

"Mom I also forgive you for that too"

Two days before my birthday you paid somebody to kill me
And give my sister money for my funeral
Because you thought I was going to die
In a house of seven children I was the only one you made sleep on the floor
Because you said I did not deserve a bed
At the age of fifteen the devil was trying to kill me
They got me so sick when I called you
You acted like you were worried
But from the bottom of your heart you weren't

"Mom I still love you"

Three months later I got released from the hospital
When I called up and I told you, you said to me
"Because they released you doesn't mean you're going to survive"
Mom you've never been there for me when I needed you
You let me down on mother's days

You forgot my birthday
Mom I still love you and will never forget you
Whenever you need some help just let me know
I will always be there to help you
I will always be there to give you all the love that you need

"Mom, my son is asking for you"

Every day he wakes up he asks me for his grandma
I feel so bad
Because my son is two and he has not met his grandma yet
I feel so bad when I see him go to his other grandmother's house
And I can't do that
Mom I was never mad at you
But just to let you know that you're still my mom
That's why I said I forgive you
I got number one love for you
Because I'm learning from my past
And wishing for tomorrow

RANDY BARRESS

Smoke, Doors and Flesh

ERIC HENDRIX

The smoke wafts down the hallway,
Curling, gnarling and drifting
Down the steps
One by one
To my room
And knocks
Before entering.

Underneath the door
From my bed
The pillows, puffed and pushed
Up against the wall
In my room
On my bed
The smoke
Curls up before me.

I thought there would be more,
I never expected less.
We live behind closed doors
Of wood and flesh
On different floors
In our home
The smoke
Separates us.

SONNIA SEAY

Haiku

EILEEN WHEELDON

morning glories peek

from beneath the bright green leaves

wealthy summer days

Emotions

DONNA SANDERS

One of my sons, only thirteen years old, made the telephone call. His emotions were running rampant as his throat constricted with the need to explain and the want to cry. His younger brother was with him in the local emergency room.

My mother answered the call. I picked up the other line.

My son's hoarse voice said, "It's Josh. Come to the hospital."

Without any explanations as to why Josh was there, we immediately left for the hospital. Throughout the trip, my mother kept asking, "What is it? What is it?" I couldn't answer her because I didn't know either.

Upon arriving at the local hospital, we saw Josh's father standing outside the emergency room doors. I asked him what was wrong. He could only tearfully say, "Emergency surgery." More alarmed, I ran into the emergency room to see my child.

He seemed fine. His stepmother explained that it was a hernia. My heart felt relief after I heard those words.

The doctors explained that they would do surgery that night to remove the hernia. The family was taken to Josh's room to await his return. Mom, Dad, grandparents, and aunt paced the floor. Yet everyone's emotions were at a normal level now, because this operation was considered to be a minor surgical procedure.

We had been told that the surgery could take up to an hour and a half. While waiting, I made a few telephone calls to more family members.

The surgeon came into the room shortly after 1 a.m. I knew something was wrong when he gathered us and closed the door. He revealed that he had discovered a tumor instead of a hernia. My heart sank as I listened carefully to the doctor's words. I began to tremble from deep within myself. I felt like someone held a string that was attached to my soul and was pulling it out.

After the doctor left the room, I had to find a chair. I felt as though I was going to faint. My father came to my aid; as tears poured out like heavy rain, he held me. But I knew that I had to stop crying. The doctor had asked us not to alarm Josh until after the biopsy results came back. We hoped to avoid alarming him at all.

Around 1:30 a.m., Josh was brought into the room. I was fine until I looked at him; the tears returned. My stepmother called me into the hallway. She consoled me but told me to be strong for Josh. I told her that it was just so hard to look at him without crying; after all, no parent wants to see his or her child be sick. However, the tears subsided after a few minutes.

Once Josh was settled in his room, our family started to disband to go home and rest. I stayed with Josh. I got into bed with him and held him as he slept. It had been a long time since I'd held "my baby" as he slept. He was twelve years old and felt that he was too old for Mommy to cuddle.

The results of the biopsy came in late Thursday afternoon. My son had Rhabdomyosarcoma. This is a type of cancer that is diagnosed in only sixty children a year. But…the cancer is treatable!

Through the following week, I felt and witnessed many different emotions. My mother cried constantly. I kept trying to reassure her that everything would be fine, yet, as I said, I was a mass of emotions. I had a positive attitude about the whole situation, but I also had weak moments when I would break down and cry again. I prayed constantly for Josh to be fine and for him to be able to handle the situation. His father kept trying to hide the truth from Josh, but I firmly believed that he should be aware of his condition. I believed that he knew that something was wrong, although he didn't speak about it. Everyone treated Josh with more kindness than usual, except for my sister. She was being oddly cold-hearted and jealous. I guessed she acted this way because

of all the attention that Josh was receiving, but I wouldn't do or say the things she did if, God forbid, it was one of her children.

One week later we were on our way to Atlanta. We met with the surgeon there to discuss treatment options. Surgery was set for the following week. The surgeon told us that everything would be fine, that she would be able to remove all of the cancer. But, she said, Josh would have to receive some chemotherapy, for better assurance that all of the cancer would be gone.

It was such a relief to know that the cancer hadn't spread and could be removed. I felt joyous and silently praised God. My ex-husband almost kissed the doctor when he gave us the news. Josh's stepmother almost cried. My mother, who was in the waiting room, cried openly after hearing the news. My father and stepmother were also pleased to hear that the cancer could be fully removed. I made telephone calls to other family members, this time to spread good news.

People take for granted that bad things only happen to others. I have always thought that my kids would never have anything seriously wrong with them. I prayed for those who were sick but always assumed that it wouldn't happen to me or mine. Now I know that sickness can strike home.

Emotions run strong and deep. People display their emotions in different ways. Some people cry in private while others cry openly. Some people blame others while others take the blame. Some people scream while others remain quiet. And some people take life for granted and live their lives as though they didn't have a care in the world.

I will never take anything for granted again.

Most of my family held strongly to each other. I believe that we will continue to be there for each other. Families may drift apart, but something always brings them back together. I truly believe that my family was pulled back together for a reason.

JUNE WINGER

LINDSAY BALDWIN

Autumn's Place

JACQUELINE ROMANSKI

The slender lithe body separates from her chamber
Door and dog motion as one
A swift vaulted leap to freedom
Muscles stretching, carrying four legs
A gentle heart, a red bastion of flight
To a place from which only loyal instinct
dictates return.

Autumn disappears, ears flapping, tail masted
Heart soaring, spirit rejoicing
An expression of nature in nature
Bonding animal to place
Into shallow ponds, a sure footed plunge
Her entrance splashes still cool water.

She is at once beauty in motion
A reflection of genetic heritage
A messenger stirring symbolic images, memories
Open fields, freedom, peace.
Autumn returns, energy spent, sandy and wet,
Perfect harmony with the setting sun
The day, the dog, and I can rest.

JOHN VAN BUMBLE

Remembering the Future

JACQUELINE ROMANSKI

A new generation in five days,
A Texas grandson, an Alabama belle
This neophyte grandma took to traveling,
Reminiscent of dormant skills
An anxious heart embraced new life
strange paper diapers and sleepy parents.

Expect new images, names, memories,
new born sounds, soft warm fragrant skin.
Dark silk hair, inquiring slate eyes
a dark purple cord; almost forgotten.
The calendar confirmed the difference
my shoulders, my hands knew the sameness.

Roles changed; daughters now mothers
at last, my grandmother status!
An amended future shapes our promised journeys
Learning, loving, letting go.
A new generation has its challenges
So do I.

Haiku

SETH CROCKETT

I'm tripping, stumbling

I am falling, help, falling

I wake from the dream

CHRISTINE HUBINGER

Sunset Wednesday

GEORGE FRIZZELL

Some days remain in fire
after memory surrenders others;
those days hold bright
feelings of events and friends;
I can't always tell one from the other,
but I know it could be
any Wednesday.

Some days are scattered like stars
against a black sky of years—
now far out of reach
yet visible still;
from here I can't even tell you
which day is what star,
but I could point out
any Wednesday.

Some days are strung together
in a memory necklace;
I can't always tell one from the other,
except to recall these are special;
I've been over them like a rosary
till they're worn smooth and feel alike
and mutter time and again,
"any Wednesday."

This day dims like the rest,
like the last and next;
but I knew once, long ago,
a crown of days set in the sky,
when days like these were not like others,
when you chose a day
you chose
any Wednesday.

I was born on Wednesday;
they've been the best and worst;
in my mind they live as myth,
and cling as legend;
so, take a day off
and bury me on
any Wednesday.

BRENDA BENIK

Room #23

KAREN GILFILLAN

A six-foot sea thrashed about, pelting us with salt water in the cockpit of the catamaran. The cat was headed north in the Gulf of Mexico. I'm a lousy sailor. If I can't see the shoreline, I grab a handhold and hang on until the dock lines are thrown off. I grinned as the cat turned starboard into the Anclote River.

We slid the cat onto the pullout ramp. I jumped over the lifelines and landed on solid ground. The crew had regular jobs waiting in St. Pete. I was staying behind to oversee the painting of the bottom of the cat. The sailors caught a ride and headed south, and I was left alone.

I inquired about the nearest motel. Dookie—don't ask, I didn't—said there was a motel just around the curve and up the road "a short." A short?

I asked Dookie, "How much would you charge me to get a lift to the motel?"

He said, "Well, I think the cost of a six pack would work purdy good fer me."

I replied, "Deal, Dook. We have a deal."

I hefted my sea bag and followed Dook to his beat-up Chevy sedan. It was necessary to wrench open the door and kick aside empty beer cans as I slid into the back seat. A couple of twists and turns later, Dook dropped me at Motel Five and a Half.

The lobby was laden with dying, sprawling plants. A cheap-looking resin squirrel was hunkered down in the dirt at the base of a potted palm. Its upturned head seemed to be peering at me with a quizzical eye. A stained coffee machine was banked by economy-sized containers of sugar and small foam cups. The month's work schedule was thumb tacked to the yellowed wall behind the counter. An off-balance stand holding pamphlets offered things to see and do in Tarpon Springs. The grungy floor was covered with tracked-in sand and dried bougainvillea petals. Motel Five and a Half would be my home for the next two days.

The clerk, wearing yesterday's smile, shoved the registry in my direction. After completing the check-in procedure, he handed me a key with the fob reading #23. His marks-a-lot nametag read Dan, or was it Don? He was thirtyish, had mid to long straggly hair, and wore non-descript Coke-bottom glasses covering, I was sure, dispirited eyes. He sported a pudgy gut and the personality of a toad. His muted plaid shirt suited him just fine.

Room #23 was located on the ground floor, midway down the row of fading aqua doors. Cigarette butts filled the planters intended to hold colorful blooms. White plastic chairs were posted like sentries beside each door. An antiquated

rusty-orange, full-sized pickup truck lingered near Room #23. It displayed a county fair-purchased license plate with the names Elsie and Jim. It was the only vehicle in the lot.

As I approached #23, clamorous yapping greeted me from #22. Appearing in the window between vertical blinds were two small, fluffy, white poodles. They were doing their best to growl. Like, get a real dog.

The door was open to #23. A lady with a pleasant smile greeted me with, "Hello, dear. I'm just about done." I assured the matronly looking woman that this would not be a problem. I plopped down my sea bag and settled into the plastic chair. The back legs buckled, and I fell flat on my back. The sun felt warm upon my body, so I stayed there.

Elizabeth—she introduced herself as she stepped over me—smiled down and said, "Your room is ready now, dear." The damp mop she was dragging didn't quite clear my face. With a gritty grin, I offered my thanks, hopped up, and grabbed my sea bag.

As I crossed the threshold of #23, the chemical smell of Elizabeth's cleaning efforts smacked my senses full on. I left the door open. I flipped a light switch. Nothing. The only working light was above the bed. I had a hunch this was going to work in my favor. I could see that the faded mauve carpet had been the recipient of major food fights and not quite cooled travel irons. There was no radio, no clock; however, there was what turned out to be a working television—two channels. This would be my link with the outside world. One full of color and pleasant voices. I turned up the volume and relished the one-sided exchange.

Glancing about during a commercial, I noticed the walls were covered with a non-distinctive, light-gray, scroll-type wallpaper peeled back where the seams met. Once-white wood molding circled the room near the ceiling. There was no molding at the base of the walls—just ill-matched wallpaper and carpet. A lone frame print hung on the far wall. It depicted sullen flowers backed by a lazy sea of foam-green water. Cheerful. The bedspread, a 1950s vintage, had been many times laundered. Washed out, sort of flowery. It showed only one cigarette burn. I threw back the spread to reveal sheets of mixed colors. They appeared to be clean. Topping the sheets was a pilled gold blanket, nubby to the touch. The bed was supported at each end by stacked two by fours.

Curiosity claimed my attention, so I followed the well-worn path into the bathroom. The tan linoleum-tile floor had a few unidentifiable markings. Grayish-white towels the size of postage stamps were neatly folded over the rusty chrome rod. A paper-covered packet of facial soap and two cellophane-covered plastic cups hovered near the ice bucket, which propped up a sign stating that ice was available for a quarter. The small window was slightly ajar, with droppings from snails covering the pane. My eyes drifted to the ceiling. The land between my upstairs neighbor and me was sagging a few inches. The area directly above my head was thriving with blackish mildew. I was fascinated as I observed the ceiling pulsating with movement from the occupant on the second floor. I chose not to linger.

Returning to the main room, I opened the blinds—and they mostly did. The sun was sliding into a sour, gray night. As I hefted my sea bag, I inadvertently bumped the connecting door to #22. The yapping began. When the noise subsided, I lightly scratched on the door. Whoa, set them off again.

The phone rang at 10:30 that evening. A gal mumbled that she was calling from the front desk. Her weary voice asked that I turn down the volume on the television set. It seemed a neighbor in an adjoining room found the noise disturbing. The only neighbors I had seen were the yappers and their mistress. I had observed her earlier as she was returning from the evening walking of her dogs. She looked less friendly than her charges. I hit the mute button and ran my hand over the connecting door. I refrained from calling the front desk regarding barking dogs.

The room was feeling stuffy. A quaint air conditioner was located above the door. After dragging over the lone chair—the arm kept popping off—I climbed upon the chair. The dials were there, but the labels had long worn off. Turning the sticky knobs back and forth, I found no response.

I stepped outside for a few moments. A mini, bright red truck wheeled by, thumping with the sound of rap music. The shaded passenger window was slowly lowered. The kid looked at me. I met his eyes. He thumped on as I stepped back inside and closed the door. The security chain was there, but no slide visible for attachment. I pulled over the floppy-armed chair and jammed it under the doorknob.

Early the next morning, I removed the chair (the arm fell off) and opened the door to be greeted by a chilly January drizzle. Oh, great. The boat will not be painted in this kind of weather.

I met a cheery Elizabeth as I headed for the office to extend my stay. "Good morning, dear." I nodded with a smile response. She was pushing a grocery cart laden with supplies for her cleaning duties. Her plodding gait pushed her body forward as she headed for an aqua door farther down the line. I dropped my smile and wondered how Elizabeth could possess a delightful attitude in what I felt was an adverse employment opportunity.

It was necessary to pass by #22. The "yaps" gave me a rousing greeting. Should I decide to dispense with an annoyance, the pooch sporting the pink bow would be the first to go.

Dan/Don was nowhere to be seen, so I conversed with the squirrel as I poured coffee into a foam cup. Stepping outside into the now pouring rain, I plunked a quarter into the newspaper dispenser. Taking a sip of long-standing coffee, I flipped to the weather prediction offered in the paper. Yep, I'm here for the long haul.

Sloshing back to my room, the yappers' mistress exited #22. We sized each other up. Her sour-looking face was surrounded by dowdy, brown hair—fashioned in a frizzy ponytail. A shapeless denim dress hung from her slumped shoulders. We would not be sharing evening conversations on the plastic chairs. Mine was broken anyway. She did not inquire as to my name. Nor I, of her. Tight-ass Tessie seemed about right to me.

As we parted ways, the orange pickup truck pulled into the lot. Indiana Jim was carrying a bucket of Kentucky fried chicken. He had a pleasant look about him.

He said, "Hey."

I responded likewise.

"You here for a lengthy stay?" he asked.

"Well, I'll tell ya, Jim, I think it's gonna be longer than I thought."

We sat down on the concrete curb and chatted awhile.

Jim said, "Me and my wife Elsie has been comin' down here for a few years now. Just trying to get out of the cold up north. She passed on last fall.

I thought I'd just come on down once again for old times' sake. We come down here for a month every winter."

"Jim," I said, "that is a lovely tribute to your wife."

"Yeah, I figure she's with me somehow."

"Well, you have a good evening now. Nice talking to you."

"Same to you, Ma'am."

Six long days later, I was carrying my sea bag to the rented vehicle I had latched onto a couple of days ago. Tessie and the fluffies were departing for their morning walk. The inquisitive yappies bounded into my vacated room. Tight Tess close on their tails. I watched with amusement…not at all sorry to be throwing off lines and sailing south.

A crash followed by a shrill scream, moans, and a last yap caught my curiosity and drove me to check out the sounds. My hefty upstairs neighbor (who turned out to be Jim) was now sitting on a double-decker john. Slightly askew, but upright. Shards of mildewed plaster adorned his hairy, beefy body. Strands of gray hair fluttered with his blinking eyes. Toilet paper clutched in his left hand. A mini pink bow protruded from between his feet. Note: A wise master does not let dogs drink from toilets. Tess was heaving into the sink while the remaining yapper scampered about her feet.

"Jim, are you okay?" I asked.

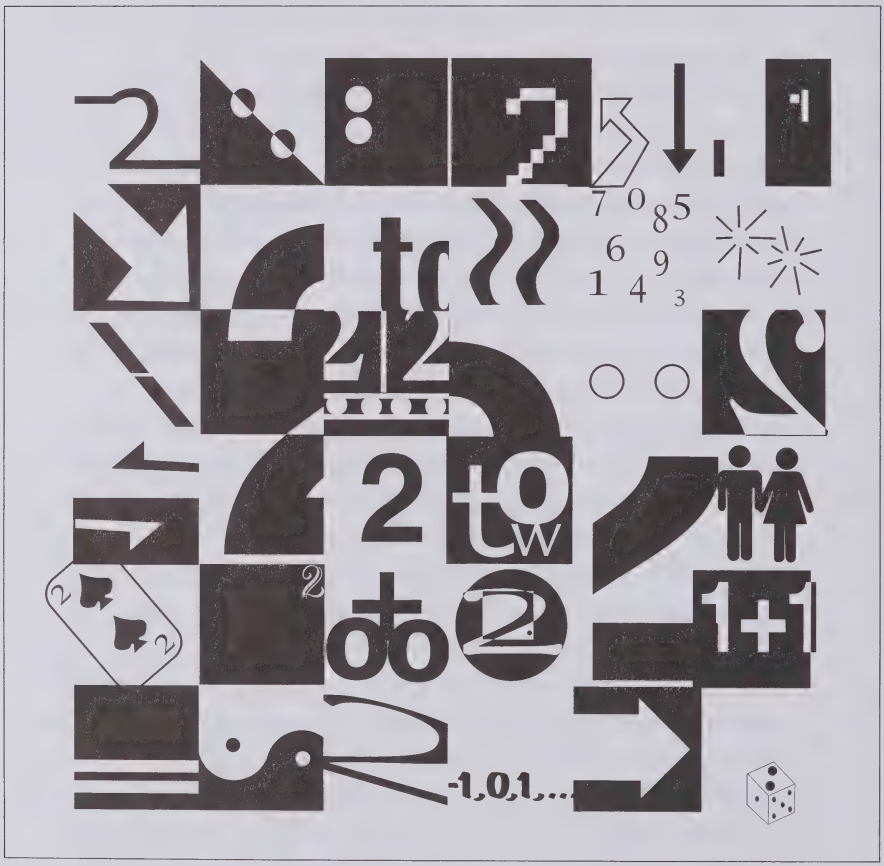
"Yeah, bit of a bump there." He sort of grinned.

I hopped into the car and drove to the office—leaving the engine running. Don/Dan actually looked at me as I handed him the key with the fob that read #23.

He inquired of me, "Any problems with your stay?"

"Well, ah, there seems to be a little problem regarding the bathroom."

Looking in the rearview mirror, I observed Dan/Don ambling toward Room #23.



TOM HURST

Where Have You All Gone

JOYCE FOSTER

We

played hopscotch

on

a shaded sidewalk

before

a yellow house

on

Summerlin Street

I

went last

Poem: White Paper Heart Queen

MISTY LACKEY

One word cuts to the white paper
Heart queen with lines.
We keep a cutting with old knifes.
Cutting her heart and eyes.
One word cuts her down in soaked tears.

GIDEON DESCHAIN

Sunday Afternoon

ERIC HENDRIX

I sit across from you,
the table separates us;
food on plates and glasses
full stare up at us
as we discuss.
Your life everyday
that I do not know
anymore.
It wasn't always so, was it?
Once
upon a very long time ago,
centuries it seems,
lifetimes, for sure;
once I held you at night
before you went to sleep.
I crawled into your bed
and lay next to you
touching your face with my hand
and smelling
your infant scent
wafting through my nostrils,
and there was connection.
You told me
how much you missed
hearing me toss my keys
on the counter at night
when I got home from work
as you lay listening from your bed
with your door open.
I remember the night
I crawled in bed with you to snuggle

and as I whispered love in your ears
you whispered love back to me,
but it wasn't you.
It was your best friend
and you lay sleeping on the floor beside her.
You cried when I decided
it was best to live with your mother
and to just visit me
when I remarried and embraced
a new family.
You felt left out.
We didn't know then
what we know all too well now,
and the years are behind us
as we sit at this table
separated by the empty glasses
and the bare plates.
You are a woman now
and grey
tones down the black
that I wore so proudly
when you were younger.
There are walls balancing
on the plates and the glasses,
there are lifetimes transpiring
as we seek common ground.
I see maturity
and I see your face
and I hear the keys striking the counter
as I walk back to your room
for goodnight.

APRIL RICH

DANIEL BROOKS

am i

DAVE WALDROP

you say you saw it on the evenin news
you said man that just aint right
them kids was killin each other
and it was out in the broad daylight

you say those are the children
aint no fortunate ones
aint goin no long distance
no long run

but its the land of the brave
its the home of the free
are you gonna judge me
by what you see on your t.v.

and you say youve been sittin there thinking
just wonderin bout them kids
are they ever gonna be forgiven
for the things they did

and who is to bless and wholl bear the blame
and who are the guilty and where in the world is the shame

in the land of the brave
and the home of the free
are you gonna judge me
by what you see on your t.v.

And for the support of this declaration,
with a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence,
we mutually pledge to each other our lives,
our fortunes and our sacred honor.

and the cloth said billy youre a mighty fine boy
if you stick with me therell be a lot of joy
and the teacher said johnny so welcome at school
but if you aint goin to college how you gonna be cool
and bobbys lookin for his daddy in the numbers books
but he may never find him no matter how hard he looks

but its the land of the brave and the home of the free
are you gonna judge me by what you see on your t.v.

am i my brothers keeper am i my brothers keeper
am i my brothers keeper am i my brothers keeper
am i

JENNIFER ENLOE

HETHER PIERCE

Dancing on the Road

REGINA SWIMMER

There was going to be a pow-wow not too far from where I lived, just about fifty or so miles away. I took some time off from work and talked my roommate into going with me. I wanted to see just what kind of people ventured to these ceremonies. I had been to several, but that was before it was "cool" to be Indian or Native American.

As we walked toward the building, we could hear muffled drumming. Suddenly, guns started firing.

My friend looked at me strangely and asked, "What is that?"

I grinned and said, "They're shooting the white people as they come through the door!"

This was her first pow-wow. She knew that I had to be joking, but apparently she didn't see the humor in what I'd said.

It was the Grand Entry that starts the pow-wow. It usually consists of war veterans carrying the American flag, followed by the dancers who compete in different categories: women, men, juniors, and seniors. Throughout, singers surround a drum.

One dancer caught my eye. He was about my age and was dressed in feathers and beadwork. He seemed caught up in the dancing and the music and unaware of the other dancers. His eyes intently focused on something only he could see. Each gesture was intentional and meaningful. Each step had purpose. His moves reflected pride and dignity. His movements took advantage of the melody.

I wondered how long he'd been doing this. Was it just a weekend whim or a way of life for him? I decided that when I got the chance, I would ask him.

Around noon the master of ceremonies announced that there would be a break in the dancing. I thought this perhaps would be a good opportunity to speak with the dancer who'd earlier caught my eye. He disappeared as soon as the cluster of dancers dispersed, but after a short while, I spotted him. He had changed from his costume into casual clothing.

To my surprise, he was very talkative and glad to answer my questions. First, I asked where he was from.

"I'm living in New Mexico at the moment. But I travel with my dancing, so even though my mail goes there, my home could be anywhere in the world."

I hadn't realized that the cultural realm of native dance was so vast. His words aroused my curiosity; I wanted to know more about this world traveler. I asked him where he'd grown up and how he'd learned to dance.

"I grew up on a reservation. I am full-blooded Indian. Not any one tribe, but my degree of Indian blood equals full. I didn't start dancing until I was thirteen years old. It started as a hobby. The better I got, the more people noticed me. After only a few months, I decided to start dancing on the street for tips. Where I lived was a tourist town, so there was money to be made.

"After I graduated from high school, I was offered a dance and theater scholarship at a major university. I began to tour with an all-Indian dance troupe. Not only did I get to see the world, but I also learned a lot about other tribes and people."

He began to talk about performing in grand opera houses in Italy and Australia. He recounted walking the steps of the Parthenon in Greece and shouting from the Great Wall of China. This all took place during his college years.

"And after that?" I asked. As I said earlier, he was about my age, and college was at least fifteen years behind me.

"I tried the nine-to-five jobs. But I just couldn't get the dance out of my mind."

I wanted to know how often he danced now.

"I dance every chance I get. If I'm not touring with a dance company, then I am riding the pow-wow circuit."

I wasn't familiar with the term, so I asked him, "Do you just go from place to place?"

"Yes, whenever and wherever there is money to be made." He pointed to a poster on the wall, which indicated that money was paid to the top finishers in all dance categories. He chuckled, as if to himself, and without hesitation began telling what I would soon find out was a great adventure. Perhaps he was merely amusing himself or just killing time, but I found it fascinating.

"After my college years, a few of my closest friends and I traveled from pow-wow to pow-wow. None of us ever had much, but we always seemed

to be able to scrape up enough gas money for our war-pony to get us there."

"War-pony?" I asked.

"Yeah, that's what we called our cars; they all had names. Mine was 'Spirit Dancer.' We were lucky if there wasn't too much wire showing through the rubber on the tires. Most of our ponies didn't even have working heaters. They were strictly transportation and weren't much to look at. We would load up the cooler in the back seat, starting our trip with a loaf of bread, a package of bologna, and a six pack."

I wanted to know how he decided which pow-wow to attend.

"First, we would check out who would be playing the drums. The 'host drum,' we call it." He said that the better drum groups brought out the best dancers. "Sometimes we would just go someplace close. Sometimes we would go to where the girls were." A nostalgic smile crossed his face. "The girls that ride the circuit are all the same. Some are there, like us, for the prize money, and others are there as the prize." He looked at me and grinned. I knew I wouldn't get any more comment on that subject.

We went to a makeshift cafeteria for a cup of coffee and to sit for a while. I wanted to know more of the story, and he seemed to want to finish it. When we were seated, I asked about his costume.

"We don't call it a costume. It is our 'outfit' or 'regalia.' Costumes are for Halloween and pretend. When we dress up, we're not pretending to be Indians; we are Indians!"

His voice reflected some deep emotion, hostility maybe. I wasn't sure. He was quiet for a moment. Either he was letting me absorb this information, or he was waiting for calm to return. Then he explained his regalia: bustles, usually two, one worn on the shoulders and one around the waist; and a roach, head gear made of porcupine quail hair and deer tail, with two eagle feathers on the top to symbolize honor. The beadwork represented scenes or traditions within a family or tribe.

He leaned close to me and whispered, "Take a look around."

I slowly turned my head. Dancers and their families surrounded the tables. About three-fourths of the dancers had changed into street clothes.

"Do you see?" he asked. He could read the confusion on my face. "All the

people still in their outfits are non-Indians. Hobbyists, wannabees, weekend warriors."

He didn't say this out of malice or to make fun. He simply made a statement. He leaned back in his chair and started to giggle. I started to laugh too, whether from his words or his actions, I'm not sure. We laughed until we both forgot what had started it all. When we quieted, I asked him to continue with his story.

"We were just kids. We weren't sure what was out in the world, and most of the time we didn't care."

"Did you win the top prize money often?" I asked.

"Usually not the top prize. Most of the time there were four of us, and we could count on one of us placing in the money. When a couple of us won, we could afford to eat in a nice restaurant, and sometimes even stay in a motel. But more than once we had to sleep in the car alongside of the road. After a couple of years, my traveling buddies started settling down, getting married and having families. It makes it hard on a marriage when you're gone all the time. It's easy to get sidetracked and pulled down the wrong road at these pow-wows."

Just for a moment, I saw a frown between his brows. Quickly he looked down, and the expression was lost.

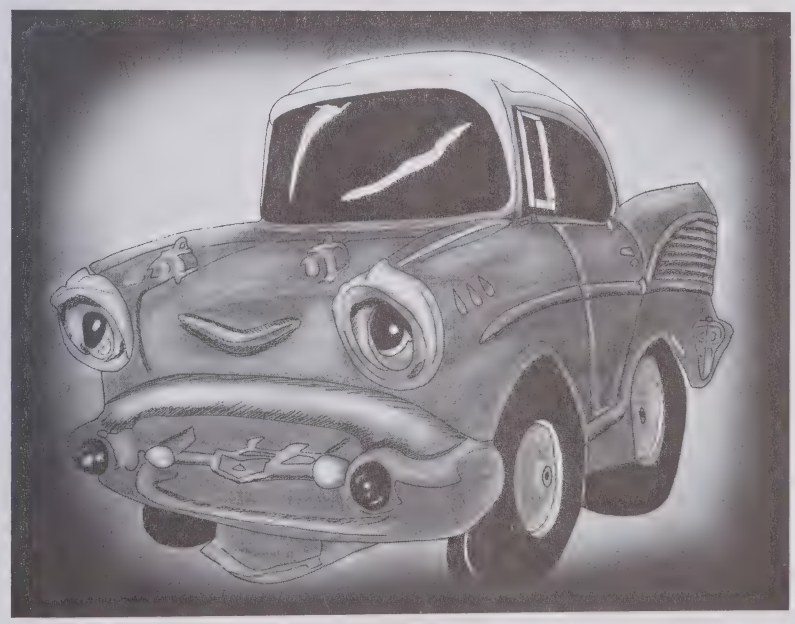
We heard the master of ceremonies calling all of the dancers back to the floor. He stood to leave.

"It's been nice talking to you. Wish me luck! Maybe I'll see you again sometime."

I stayed the rest of the afternoon and watched my newfound friend. When it came time for the awards to be given, his name wasn't called.

I caught up with my roommate, who wanted to know where I'd been during the afternoon. I assured her that I would tell her all about it on the way home. While walking through the parking lot, I kept an eye out for him. Then I spotted him loading his things into an old Chevrolet. It had bad tires and was covered with highway dust. There were bumper stickers on the trunk: "Authentic Indian Car" and "White Men Can't Dance." As he started the engine, I saw him reach into the back seat and lift the lid to his cooler. He drove off, down the road, alone.

TOM HURST



CLIFFORD LAIL

Dawn

MICHAEL REVERE

deafening implosion
        silent explosion,
a smoldering abyss
        of illusion, confusion
and long distance reality,
        staring us both
straight in the eye
where we be.
Pieces of me
        over here,
pieces of you
over there.
We reach
for each other
touch,
uncertain
wounded spirits
but love intact.
Soulmate silk
strong as love
fragile
as our hearts
subject to pain
cold rain
miracles
and sunrise.

CHRISTINE HUBINGER

The Battle of the Birdfeeder

EDWINA HAUVERSBURK

"Harve," I yelled, slamming the back door so hard the window rattled. "I've had it! Those aggravating little devils have got to go."

My husband sat, sipping his morning coffee and reading the sports news, unperturbed. "What are you all upset about?" he asked half-interestedly and continued reading.

"Those dad-burn, infuriating, hairy little varmints that are over-running the place. THAT'S what I'm upset about!"

"Oh, you mean the squirrels? I thought you like having them around."

"Not anymore. Do you know what they're doing? They're sitting in the new birdfeeder, and seeds are flying in every direction. There's not a bird in sight."

"For every problem there is a solution," he quoted, as he rose and folded his paper. "What we have to do is keep the squirrels from reaching the feeder."

He strolled out the back door with me dogging his heels.

"That's pretty obvious, isn't it? Why else would you mount the feeder on a twelve-foot post and plant it in an open area?"

We studied the layout. Harve wanted to cover the post with a sheet of aluminum. I thought it would look unsightly and take away from the natural woodsy-look of the back yard. When I suggested greasing the post, he grinned and pointed out that the wood was rough. I guess he was picturing those squirrels with splinters in their little tushes. The idea did have a certain appeal. However, my suggestion did seem ludicrous, and I found myself grinning back at him.

Finally, Harve snapped his fingers and said, "I've got it!" He started with determined strides toward the tool shed.

"What are you going to do?" I asked. He didn't answer.

I returned to the kitchen and the sink of dirty dishes. However, my curiosity couldn't be denied, and I kept taking peeks out the kitchen window. I couldn't see a thing, but I could hear Harve's hammering and whistling. It seemed like an eternity before he yelled for me.

Understandably, I was a tad anxious. My husband is extremely competent when it comes to plumbing, mechanical, or electrical problems, but carpentry is not one of his greatest talents. I couldn't help

wondering what sort of ugliness he had created. This time, however, I was ashamed of my doubts. His invention not only had eye appeal but also blended nicely with the view. In fact, I had to admit that the concept was downright brilliant.

Basically, what Harve had done was remove the top from a worn-out roof power ventilator. The gadget was bell shaped, two feet in diameter, and made of thick, gray, hard plastic. He had attached the dome of the bell to the base of the birdfeeder so that it encircled the post evenly on all sides.

"Do you think it will work?" I asked excitedly.

"Trust me," he said smugly. "There's no way those squirrels can get to the feeder unless they sprout wings and fly."

We filled the feeder with seed and watched the results at a distance. Shortly thereafter, a variety of birds were dining enthusiastically. A squirrel descended from a nearby tree, scampered boldly up the post, circled the bell a couple of times and ran back down. We figured the problem was solved.

For two days, peace reigned. Then Harve came home from work on Monday afternoon and found me poring over the encyclopedia.

"What are you doing," he asked.

"Reading about squirrels. This morning I counted a dozen of them running around the patio. Did you know they build nests in the forks of tree branches? I counted, and there's a nest in about every tenth tree surrounding the yard. Since we live in the middle of three acres of trees, can you imagine how many there are out there?" I looked up to see how he was taking such important information.

"I think you're beginning to suffer from squirrel-obsession syndrome," he teased.

"Maybe so, but listen to this." I returned to my reading. "They multiply like crazy. A female can produce a litter of six twice a year. They have a life expectancy of six years; that figures to a total of seventy-two in a lifetime. Now, if half of each litter is female and they produce likewise…why, we would need a calculator to figure the population growth generated by one squirrel!"

"In the first place, you're not taking into consideration the balance of nature, Honey. All things have natural enemies. What does it say about that?"

"The first one listed is man, and since we live in a wildlife sanctuary, that takes care of that one. The next is dogs, and you know ole Buster is too lazy to do his part. He's been chasing squirrels for years and hasn't caught one yet. It also lists coyotes and foxes. I've never seen any around here, have you?"

"Nope, but I wouldn't worry about it. I doubt there's enough squirrels to take over the place…for a couple of weeks, at least," he teased.

"Don't be too sure of that. They're smart little devils. This morning there was one hanging on the feeder post with his hind legs, slapping at the edge of the bell with his front legs. I was hoping he would fall and break his greedy neck!"

At this point, lest you are beginning to think I'm a deranged, cold-blooded animal hater, let me assure you that my opinion of squirrels didn't change instantaneously, but took place over a period of months…and with plenty of justification. There was a time when I thought squirrels were a beautiful example of God's handiwork, placed on earth for our enjoyment. At first I enjoyed the little creatures and left breadcrumbs and sunflower seeds for them on the patio. They were so cute with their little tails flying at half-mast as they chased one another up and down trees. Some time passed before I noticed the bulging increase in their population, and their destruction.

Most people don't think of squirrels as being destructive; they think they're sweet-mannered little animals whose primary purpose on earth is to collect acorns and enhance the joy of nature lovers. Not so! Perhaps I should explain how I reached my conclusion. First, I am pretty easygoing. I operate on a long fuse, and it takes a lot of provocation to get me riled. Even then I have to think over the situation and decide if I should be angry. Then I go into a slow boil that eventually builds to combustion.

When the squirrels demolished my tomato bushes, I didn't complain. When they stripped my peach tree, I shrugged my shoulders. When they took care of their little bodily functions on the front porch, I just cleaned it up. I'll have to admit I was pretty miffed, though, when they tore apart my handmade macramé hangers on the porch and dumped my prize ferns upside down. But even then, I gritted my teeth and spent the morning repotting.

However, the day I took my car in to have it serviced and found the air filter full of acorns, and came home to find the lawn sprouting a bumper

crop of miniature oak trees, my temper began to reach the danger point. Detonation occurred on Tuesday morning, when they attacked the birdfeeder.

They had gone too far; that feeder was special. We bought it at a specialty shop while on vacation. It was a beautiful piece of craftsmanship, made of cedar with a shingle roof and glass side panels to hold the seed. We justified the high price by telling ourselves it was the perfect accessory for the back yard.

On closer inspection of the birdfeeder, I could see that a two-inch swathe had been gnawed from the edge of the bell to the top of the post. And part of the post was missing, along with a big chunk from the corner of the feeder. Combustion had finally been reached.

I grabbed a broom and charged the patio, shrieking like a wild banshee. The squirrels immediately scattered, raced up the nearest trees to the lowest hanging branches and sat there, chattering. As soon as I returned to the house, they came down and started eating at the feeder again.

All morning long, we repeated the process. By noon, I was exhausted, but I wasn't about to surrender. I was more determined to rid my back yard of pestilence. To me, as Winston Churchill once said, "This was wah!"

I collapsed in a porch chair and considered my options. One thing came to mind. Without giving possible consequences a thought, I grabbed the twenty-two rifle and a handful of bullets. I know little about guns and was unsure how to load the thing. Eventually, I figured it out and sallied forth. This time I was confident of success.

However, the gun was old and the sight was warped. My first shots knocked the bark off a tree twenty feet to the right of the feeder and brought down a shower of leaves. To add to my anger, the squirrels ignored me and continued feasting. Obviously, the rifle wasn't doing the job. What I needed was heavier combat equipment. The skirmish had become a contest of wills, and I was disconcertedly feeling that I wasn't properly armed, in more ways than one.

I again retreated to the house but returned to battle lugging a shotgun. This weapon was heavier and harder to load and operate than the rifle. After getting the bullets in what I hoped were the right holes and again concealing myself behind the back door, I wondered if I should shoot the squirrels while they sat on the post, and probably demolish the rest of the feeder in the process, or scare them and bag them in flight? I opted for the latter and

stumbled from behind the door, hefted the gun to my shoulder, aimed in the general direction of the fleeing squirrels, and pulled the trigger. When my ears quit ringing and the pain in my shoulder had subsided to a dull ache, I looked around. The only damage I could see were two denuded azalea bushes.

By mid-afternoon, we were still at a standoff. Between shots, the squirrels returned to the feeder, undaunted and no worse for wear, while I took stock. So far, not counting the azaleas, I had made direct hits on the picnic table, the grill, and one gardenia bush, plus a near miss on the wrought-iron lantern.

"OK, you win for now, you bunch of lowlifes!" I tried to yell but only croaked. In one last spurt of anger, I took the sack of birdseed and emptied it all over the ground. Then I lowered my aching, bruised body into a porch rocker, propped up my feet, and massaged my throbbing arm, which was turning blue from elbow to shoulder.

I watched the backyard scene with a sense of detachment. Soon the squirrels had emptied the feeder, had descended the post, and were busily munching on the ground seed. A little later, birds began to settle gracefully among the squirrels. They seemed unaware that others were encroaching on their meal and pecked contentedly among the grass blades, searching for smaller seeds hidden there.

How strange, I thought. Then I remembered a passage from the Bible. Job 12:7 says, "But ask now the beasts, and they shall teach thee: and the fowls of the air, and they shall tell thee."

Well, the squirrels had tried to teach me and the birds had tried to tell me, but I had been too angry to pay attention. They all seemed to be cohabitating harmoniously. Was it all a part of God's master plan? And what right had I, a mere mortal, to disrupt it?

At dawn of the next day the squirrels awakened me from a sound sleep by scaling the porch screen with sharp little claws and scampering back and forth on the roof above my head, sounding like a herd of buffaloes. I mused sleepily about what I would have to do to get a pack of coyotes to take up residence behind the house before pulling the pillow over my head and dozing off again. Harve snored loudly.

JUNE WINGER

Lonesome Soul

MICHAEL REVERE

The coldest winter of my life
was not for lack of blankets
heat or fire,
the freezing fact of the matter is
I was not with you.

JACQUELINE ROMANSKI

Time

MICHAEL E. BINGHAM

To the inanimate world, time is a process that allows for the nurturing and maturation of events, both natural and contrived, and for the undoing and destruction of those events by the same device. To the living world, especially the very young, it may appear as never-ending as the motion of the water in an endless sea. When reflected upon by an elderly gentleman, as he examines his past goals and accomplishments, it may seem as fleeting as some fond but dusty memory that hovers at the edge of his perception.

The only constant we have is the tick of the clock, but I sometimes wonder how constant that measure really is. The ticks are steady as far as measurement is concerned, but variable as to how many we will hear and what they try to tell us.

Time will pass, and the way we perceive its passing will yield our ultimate description of it at any point on a fascinating journey through it. At times our perceptions are good; sometimes they are not. Sometimes we think we have too much time; other times not enough. But the idea of too much or too little time has no seemingly practical use, however, since we can neither buy nor sell it. But if we apply a bit of intuition, and the calloused hand of fate is gentle with us, we may hope to bargain with time, use its flow, and ride its currents on a varying but finite journey into the future. We can use our memories and experiences to roam backwards from the present to the past, and we may be surprised to find that the vague uneasiness we sometimes feel when we contemplate the future can be found lurking in the past.

This uneasiness is the voice of time itself, telling us to link the past to the future so that we can live the present for all it can be.

CLIFFORD LAIL

Call for Submissions

Manuscripts for the 2005 edition of SCC *Milestone* will be accepted through December 1, 2004. In the event that funding is not secured for publication, submissions will be held and considered for the next issue.

Each submission should include the author's name, address, and phone number on every page.

Essays, local history, poetry, and short stories—as well as black-and-white artwork—may be submitted. All submissions should be typed or printed, and prose is limited to 2,000 words.

Seven people whose manuscripts or works of art are selected for publication will also receive cash rewards.

- First and second prize in poetry
- First and second prize in prose
- First and second prize in artwork
- Cover

Students, faculty, staff, and alumni—along with residents of Macon, Swain, and Jackson counties and the Qualla Boundary—may submit manuscripts to the SCC *Milestone*.

For additional information, contact Southwestern Community College's Public Information Office at 828-586-4091, extension 265.

SOUTHWESTERN
COMMUNITY COLLEGE